

MINUTES
SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
BJ's Restaurant
990 N. Center Street
Gaylord, Michigan
October 23, 2007

Chairman Manson called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 9:36a.m., Tuesday, October 23, 2007, in Gaylord, Michigan.

Members Present:

Bill Manson, Chair, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA), Grand Rapids
Bill Lucas, Region II, MSA, Cadillac
Lee Murray, At-Large, Hopkins
Jack Nelson, Business Community, Greenville
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington
David Thomas, Trail Sponsors, Marquette

Members Absent:

Jim Duke, Region I MSA, Munising

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Anne Okonek, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest
Carol Boll, USDA, Huron-Manistee National Forest
Terry L. Johnson, Antrim County Sheriff's Department
Lt. Dave Davis, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Roscommon

Staff Present:

Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Unit Manager, FMFM, Lansing
Steve Kubisiak, Recreation and Trails Program Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Richard Kennedy, FMFM, Lansing
William O'Neill, FMFM, Gaylord
Don Klingler, FMFM, Gaylord
Joe Soncrainte, FMFM, Atlanta
Robin Pearson, FMFM, Gaylord
Loretta Cwalinski, FMFM, Gaylord

Mr. Manson welcomed everyone and advised that Mr. Duke would not be attending the meeting. The Committee, DNR staff and the audience introduced themselves.

MINUTES

The minutes of the June 12, 2007, SAC meeting was acknowledged.

Motion was made by Mr. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Thomas, to adopt the minutes of the June 12, 2007 meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Law Enforcement Subcommittee -- Mr. Murray advised there was no report.

Finance Subcommittee -- Mr. Olson advised there was no report

NEW BUSINESS

MSA Permit Distribution Policy -- Mr. Radabaugh said he wanted to discuss the Michigan Snowmobile Association's (MSA) involvement in distributing snowmobile trail permits.

Mr. Manson reported MSA distributes trail permits to 350 agents on a no cost consignment basis. He said MSA sent a letter to their permit agents saying they needed to become a commercial member of MSA in order for them to continue to sell snowmobile trail permits. He said this was needed in order for MSA to cover their costs. He indicated they have received a few calls from their agents in disagreement of that decision.

Mr. Radabaugh said the Department could sell permits to agents for re-sale if they do not wish to become a commercial member of MSA.

Mr. Radabaugh noted trends indicate that pre-printed permit sales are declining while permits sold electronically through the retail sale system (RSS) terminals are increasing. He said the Department is looking at administrative efficiencies and considering eliminating the pre-printed permit to streamline the distribution program.

Mr. Manson said he is concerned that not all areas of the state have good retail sales coverage. He believes it is important to provide trail permits to hotels and gas stations to increase availability, especially for out of state visitors coming to Michigan to snowmobile.

Overview of Handbook Addendum Process -- Mr. Radabaugh reviewed the process used to amend the snowmobile grant handbook. Several sponsors raised concerns regarding the handbook at the June SAC meeting. The Department requested the SAC collect the sponsor concerns. Fifteen concerns were identified. An agenda was developed and two meetings were held between SAC members and Department staff. Some issues were left unchanged and some were modified based on the meetings. No changes were made to the equipment section. Addendum #1 was issued prior to the pre-season meetings. As a result of questions raised at the pre-season meetings a second addendum was prepared to provide clarification. The second addendum along with a cover letter explaining the process was mailed to the sponsors last week.

Mr. Manson said the 15 items were pared down to 5 remaining issues and addendum #2 addressed 4 of them. He said the issue of ownership of previously cost-shared equipment was not addressed and is the major concern of some sponsors.

Mr. Radabaugh said there was a third meeting with Mr. Manson and Mr. Lucas where detailed discussions regarding cost-shared equipment occurred. The wording regarding equipment will remain the same as outlined in the addendum #2. He said that by

returning the state cost-shared portion back to the program it will capture program assets as the program moves toward a 100% equipment purchase program. He said this is a way to keep the program on track financially. He added we need to keep future financial sustainability of the program in mind.

Mr. Thomas asked if it was the DNR's position that if the agreement is signed it rescinds the earlier grants for equipment. **Mr. Radabaugh** said that it does not rescind past agreements.

Mr. Reed, Seney Sno Association, produced an equipment grant agreement that was reviewed by Mr. Manson and discussed. **Mr. Manson** said the agreement does not say what happens to the equipment after 3, 5, or 8 years. He said the sponsors are reading this to mean the equipment becomes the property of the club.

Mr. Nelson wanted clarification that if a grant sponsor does not sign the new agreement that the club will lose their previous grants. **Mr. Radabaugh** said no, they will not lose their original contract rights.

Mr. Olson wanted clarification on grooming grants and equipment grants – he wanted to be sure that this agreement does not jeopardize any equity that the groomers have in their equipment.

Mr. Manson opened the floor to questions from the audience.

Mr. Brandt, Cheboygan Trail Blazers asked about their 60/40 cost shared equipment. He said their concern is that they are volunteers, but feel like they are being pressured to sign the grant agreement. **Mr. Manson** asked if they have to trade in old equipment. **Mr. Radabaugh** said it will be difficult to fund the new equipment if it is not traded in.

Mr. Marzean, Alpena Snowmobile Association said they spent two years going over the handbook, and that Ms. Boyd said they would own their equipment when the program goes to 100 percent after five years of owning that equipment.

Martin Cottle, Sault Snowmobile Association and **EUP Sno Council** stated that they have an old track truck that they've owned for five years. The program did not pay for that and he feels that the new contract should not affect any old contracts.

Mr. Houk, Presque Isle Sno-Trails said he agreed with Mr. Cottle's statement. Their equipment is all in excess of five years old that have had additional repairs that were not covered by the program. They feel they should own their equipment after five years, but the new contract says that repairs on old equipment will be considered on "case-by-case" basis. He feels that if it's in the program it should be covered.

Mr. Reed said the money they get from the program will be spent on their equipment and essentially go back into the program. He has a concern over the wording of what they should be able to spend the money on.

Mr. White, Ogemaw Hills said that this could be a long term issue and asked if anyone has an idea on how many tractors would be needed this season.

Mr. Kuchnicki, Harbor Springs Sno Club said that they chose to keep their equipment but had a question about certain repairs. **Mr. Radabaugh** said they should submit their repair costs for funding consideration. **Mr. Kennedy** said it should be eligible and to submit a reimbursement request. He reiterated funding decisions for repairing equipment older than five years will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Ms. Jergenson, State Senator Stamas' District Representative asked how much revenue the program generates and how much would it cost to pay to have the trails groomed versus having the volunteer program.

Mr. Cottle said he feels that it shouldn't have gone to 100 percent until the trail permit increase. He also wondered where the five year clause came in. **Mr. Radabaugh** said that the discussion took place over the summer and 2002 was decided upon. **Mr. Cottle** said the contention is five years, but now it says six years.

Ms. Houk, P.I. Snow Trails suggested that the language in the addendum be changed from 'must' or 'will' to 'should'.

Mr. Eller, Alpena Sno Association, NE MI Sno Council suggested the equipment section be removed from the handbook.

Mr. Dingman, Trailriders, Baldwin said their money is their money, and their club has a 12 year old tractor which was purchased under the 60/40 agreement. Part of it was paid for from a track truck that was sold to them. A lot of money has been spent on it to keep it running, and has been fixed by volunteers.

Mr. Nelson wanted to know if Forest, Mineral and Fire Management's snowmobile administration costs will be reduced since the Department will no longer be grooming trails. **Mr. Radabaugh** said administration costs will not be reduced since the division still needs to oversee the program.

Mr. Murray complimented the DNR for the work done for the program and that the sponsors should understand that. He also complimented the audience on keeping the meeting civil in these discussions and added that grooming is important for Michigan and that the program needs to continue. He recommended making a motion that the SAC stands firm in the support of the agreement that came from the Workgroup Committee meeting that the equipment becomes the property of the grant sponsors after five years.

Mr. Murray made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lucas, that the SAC stands firm in the support of the agreement that came from the Workgroup Committee meeting that the equipment becomes the property of the grant sponsors after five years.

Manson – Aye

Nelson – Aye

Thomas – Aye

Olson – Aye

Lucas – Aye

Murray -- Aye

Mr. Thomas made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lucas, that Section F regarding equipment be deleted from the current 2008 snowmobile grant handbook and that

a separate handbook be developed for equipment. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. Radabaugh said he will take their recommendation under advisement and discuss it with Grants Management.

Mr. Cottle said he feels that they have lost their ability to bargain. He disagrees with the recommendation to separate equipment from the handbook.

2008 Budget Update -- **Mr. Radabaugh** reported it has been an unusual month with regard to the State budget. The legislature passed a 30 day continuation budget that will end November 1. Grants Management is unable to send out grant agreements until there is a full operating budget for fiscal year 2008. Letters were sent to the sponsors explaining the situation. Sponsors can contact Jim Wood in Grants Management if there are any questions.

Mr. Radabaugh said that the State Administrative Board must approve all grants over \$25,000 before they can be executed by the Department. Provided a 2008 budget is passed by the legislature this month, the snowmobile grants will be placed on the Administrative Board's November 6th meeting agenda. Once the grants are approved by the Administrative Board, agreements can be mailed to the sponsors.

Mr. Manson asked about the Cheboygan trail that a club is taking over from the Department. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the club can do work under a volunteer agreement until the grant is signed. He added the Department is working on transferring equipment to the club.

Mr. Olson asked if there is no budget by December 1st if there is a contingency plan in place. **Mr. Radabaugh** said there cannot be a contingency plan without a budget. He suggested the sponsors contact their legislators to encourage them to pass a State budget that would allow the Department to issue grants to groom trails this winter. Discussion continued on funding.

Trail Proposal Updates -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reported Mancelona to Blue Bear and the Kalkaska to Mancelona are under review. Rogers City north has all field review signatures and will go to the Unit Manager in Atlanta. Rogers City south (quarry) there have been difficulties meeting with the owners and attorneys. The October meeting was postponed, but hoping for a November meeting. They are working on getting a route around the quarry. There will be an Alpena bypass if Graham Road has been approved. Black Mountain is approved.

USDA, Huron-Manistee National Forest – **Ms. Boll** reported easements across private lands at the 56th Street bypass in Baldwin have been obtained and the club should be able to begin work on the trail next summer.

Ms. Pearson reported Department staff is providing comments to the Forest Service on the old M-65 bridge trail proposal connector 9 and 96. **Mr. Manson** asked why it has taken three years for the process. **Ms. Boll** said that Consumers Power has agreed but it is in the hands of their attorneys. There cannot be a trail proposal until Consumers Power moves the paperwork.

STAFF REPORTS

Gaylord to Mackinaw City Trail Update – **Mr. DeBrabander** reported the federal enhancement grant for trail resurfacing is complete. The Parmater Road tunnel is currently under construction and should be complete by the snowmobile season. **Mr. Manson** asked about the signing of the trail. **Ms. Pearson** said it was part of the enhancement contract. Discussion continued about confidence markers and other signing.

Mr. Manson requested a copy of the assessment for the Mullet Lake trail. **Ms. Pearson** said she was charged with preparing a three-year summary and is collecting data from law enforcement and other sources. A copy of the report will be provided to the SAC when it is complete.

Update on Club Grooming of Former Department Groomed Trails -- **Mr. Kennedy** advised that the Department's groomers will be transferred to the following clubs: Jordan Valley, Missaukee, Cheboygan and Presque Isle, Houghton Lake, Greater Grayling and Lewiston clubs. Mr. DeBrabander is setting up the equipment transfers.

Bridge Closure Update -- **Mr. Kubisiak** gave an update on the bridges that are closed to grooming equipment. The Department retained services of an engineering firm to evaluate nine bridges; most are multiple-use except Fur-Farm trail. Eight were listed as inadequate to support grooming equipment. Grooming can still be done up to the bridges at most of them. The bridges have been prioritized and contract documents are being prepared for Little Manistee River and Syers Creek. The bridges will remain closed to grooming equipment until they are repaired. Bridge replacement and repair will take several years because of the need to obtain funding from multiple sources.

Mr. Manson asked for clarification on the design and repair costs. **Mr. Lucas** has a concern that the top four on the list are in the same area and that the turnarounds are a concern at the bridge. He mentioned those are high-use areas and would not like to see them closed. Discussion continued on bridge weight requirements and design.

Mr. Lucas asked if there could be a temporary structure in place so as not to close the bridges. **Mr. Olson** suggested possibly doing an equipment swap to accommodate weight limits. **Mr. Kubisiak** said that the Department cannot pursue either option because no temporary bridges are available and they would still require engineering. **Mr. Radabaugh** clarified the bridges are still open to snowmobile traffic, they just cannot be groomed. **Mr. Lucas** is concerned about safety and wishes the process to be expedited.

Recreation Specialist – **Ms. Pearson** reported staff has completed GPS'ing the snowmobile trails. Maps are expected to be posted on-line on the Department's website in December.

Mr. Manson asked about Ron Yesney's report and the six grant sponsors not being able to get one blanket agreement for a private land owner. The insurance company is charging more for the premium and he questioned why there needs to be additional coverage.

Mr. DeBrabander will follow up with Mr. Yesney for further information and advise Mr. Manson.

U.S. Forest Service -- **Ms. Boll** encouraged the clubs to contact them if anything needs to be fixed on the trails, or if there are any concerns.

Ms. Okonek, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest – reported they are helping local clubs get the trails ready for the snowmobile season. They are noticing more and more ORV damage on the snowmobile trails. Forest Service applied for ORV funds for damage repairs. Motor Vehicle Use Maps are now available for the Hiawatha National Forest. She requested snowmobiler assistance to distribute the maps. A meeting with the DNR, UP Sno Fliers, MDOT and Forest Service is scheduled for November 1st to review the feasibility study for a bridge over the Whitefish River.

Law Enforcement – **Sheriff Terry Johnson** reported the bill to make blood alcohol limits for boaters, snowmobiler's and ORV operators the same as automobile drivers has been stalled in the Senate. He believes the emergency signs on the trails work really well, and reported two incidences where the locator signs came in handy. They are still waiting for their law enforcement grants.

Lt. Dave Davis reported there will be a speed limit in Bay County on portions of the Kawkawlin River this year. He said Lt. Grey has advised Sheriff Johnson as far as what might be approved for snowmobile law enforcement grants. Mr. Murray requested to be copied on any correspondence on that issue.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Mr. Gallagher, St. Helen Sno Packers asked about utility payments and signing and brushing costs. **Mr. Manson** said utility payments are still covered and contingency funds were deleted. He said the workgroup figured that even the \$90 was still high for brushing and signing.

Mr. Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions asked Ms. Boll if the Forest Service could have their gates unlocked on December 1st if there's snow. Ms. Boll will follow-up and advise.

He also asked how to have engineers review two old railroad bridges for potential use on the snowmobile trails. Mr. Green was advised to contact Todd Neiss to discuss the possibility of adding this to the engineering contract.

Mr. Axtell, Trail Riders, Baldwin said they have three bridges and one is a culvert, and that they can't turn a groomer around at the culvert.

Mr. Marzean, Alpena Snowmobile Association said there is grooming equipment that is not accounted for and there are problems with logging on the trails. **Mr. O'Neill** said the Department must follow certain procedures when disposing of equipment and proceeds are returned to the funding source used to purchase the equipment. **Mr. Marzean** said the loggers are not complying with the conditions of their contract. He wants the loggers out of the forest by November 14th so they can get their work done. **Mr. O'Neill** said that both sides need to work cooperatively together, and added that he has heard from the loggers how antagonistic and argumentative the snowmobile club can be as well. **Mr. Marzean** said his main concern is to have the loggers not block the trails with their equipment when they need to work on them because the groomers need

to comply with the conditions of their grant. **Mr. O'Neill** offered to assist in anyway he can.

Mr. Houk, P.I.S.T. & NE MI Council said they just want the loggers to return the area to the condition they started with. He also added that there are three places on Black Mountain trail that are blocked due to the recent tornado and storm damage. **Mr. O'Neill** said there is currently a FMFM plane in the air assessing that damage. **Mr. Houk** hopes that the repair funds will be shared with ORV funding.

Mr. Altman, P.I.S.T. said there was some logging damage to one of the trails back in August and there needs to be some gravel placed to fill in damage. Their field contact did not have a reply on that issue. **Mr. O'Neill** said he would find out.

Mr. Murray suggested the clubs photograph areas of concern.

Mr. White, Ogemaw Hills asked about the performance bond in the logging contracts suggested the snowmobile clubs be contacted before the contract is closed. **Mr. O'Neill** suggested he contact his FMFM field contact and Forester to see if those provisions can be added to future timber sale contracts.

Mr. Reed inquired on the status of the Shingleton Trail 8 on H15 trail proposal. **Mr. Kennedy** said that it has been approved.

Mr. Cottle asked about the 2008 budget and grooming affects; worst-case scenario, if there's snow and it's December 18th, how is it to be handled? Is the \$90 a mile still in effect, or will there be an assumption of being paid? **Mr. Radabaugh** said he does not have an answer. **Mr. Manson** added that it can not be speculated upon. **Mr. Cottle** also asked about federal dollars for the bridge repairs. **Mr. Manson** answered that yes they are being used.

Mr. Becker, St. Helen Sno Packers and Heart of North Council said they have two trail segments needing bids for ORV grading. **Ms. Pearson** advised him to contact Paige Perry.

NEXT MEETING

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 6, at 9 a.m., Best Western, M-28 East, Wetmore, Michigan

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

Public Present:

Dave Distelrath, Ogemaw Hills
Bob Martin, Ogemaw Hills
Dan White, Ogemaw Hills
Don Carroll, Ogemaw Hills
John Houk, PIST & NE MI Council
Kaye Houk, PIST
Joe Kuchnicki, Harbor Springs Sno Club

Bradley Potter, Western MI Sno Council
Denny Zoet, Western MI Sno Council
David Lowe, Western MI Sno Council
Mary A Caskey, Jordan Valley Trails
Council
William R Caskey, Jordan Valley Trls
Council

Martin Cottle, Soo Sno Assn, EUP Sno
Council
Allen Cottle, Soo Sno Assn, EUP Sno
Council
Dave Becker, St Helen Sno Packers,
Heart of North Council
Tom Gallagher, St Helen Sno Packers
Bud Longroy, St Helen Sno Packers
Brian Gallagher, Inland Lks Sno Ccl,
Tip of Mitt Sno Council
Tom Koziowski, Rosco Higgins Trak
Cruisers
Rodney Altman, PIST
Larry Marzean, Alpena Snowmobile
Assoc.
Bob Eller, Alpena Sno Assn, NE MI Sno
Council
Don Reed, Seney Sno Assn
Ken Stigers, Keweenaw Trl Services
Al Green, Cadillac Winter Promo
Terry Axtell, Trail Riders – Baldwin
George Zajac, Trailriders – Baldwin
Jim Dingman, Trailriders – Baldwin
Jim Stachon, Cheboygan Trail Blazers
Fred Brandt, Cheboygan Trl Blazers
Mary Jergenson, State Senator Stamas-
District Representative

